COACH AND BUS WEEK

CBW

4 AUGUST 2005 ISSUE 690

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CBW

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OPERATORS FUMING AT SEATBELT PLAN

Entire Irish schools fleet must be fitted

IRISH operators say they have been given a slap in the face by legislators who plan to fit the entire Irish schools fleet with seatbelts.

After sustained public pressure on the government following the tragedy at Kentstown in Co Meath in May, when five children died, the Irish Government has decided to end the '3 for 2' seating rules in secondary schools, buy 130 new vehicles for Bus Éireann, and insist that the 2,500 privately-operated school buses contracted to Bus Eireann are seat-belted.

But trade association the Coach Tourism and Transport Council of Ireland says not a single independent operator was consulted or even asked for ideas, and the school bus fleet – 80% of which is supplied by the private sector – will have just 18 months to retrofit seatbelts.

"Nobody has consulted us for any reason, even if just to get a few ideas," said CTTC chief executive Cora Collins. "The contracts don't go out to operators from Bus Éireann until August, and they want 250 more buses by September. That hasn't given us much time."

Mrs Collins says a number of questions remain unanswered, including any statement of whose responsibility it will be to ensure belts are worn: "We don't think much thought has gone into this situation," Mrs Collins told CBW. "It will cost about 3,500 euros per vehicle to fit seat belts. We don't yet know what the rate increase will be to pay for this."

Work begins immediately on the national carrier Bus Éireann's 900+ school bus fleet, although private operators have until the end of 2006 to convert over 2,500 vehicles.

The scheme will cost Euro 36m in the first year and then Euro 11m every year after.

An expansion of both the public and privately provided sectors of the School Transport Scheme is set to follow the announcement by Education Minister Mary Hanafin. An additional 250 small buses will need to be contracted from private operators starting September, while Bus Éireann will need to add a further 130 full-size buses to its school fleet. Twenty of these will be new custom-built 'yellow' schoolbuses, with a view to trialling the different types which are currently on the market.

Minister of State, with special responsibility for School Transport Síle de Valera said "the fitting of seat belts on all buses in the school transport system is part of our commitment to ensuring that the safety remains a top priority for the Department and Bus Éireann.

"My Department, along with the Departments of Transport and Finance and Bus Éireann have looked at best international practice and EU standards in relation to the use of safety belts. International expert advice was also obtained."

"What we plan is the phased elimination of the '3 for 2' seating and introduction of seat belts on all school buses in the shortest feasible timeframe."

"We are looking all the time at following best practice and will continue to work with our colleagues in the Department of Transport and Bus Éireann on wider safety issues."

All of Ireland's school buses must have seatbelts by the end of 2006

£1.9 MILLION FOR DUBLIN BUS SECURITY

IRISH Transport Minister Martin Cullen has announced a 2.8 million euro (£1.9m) scheme to improve security and deter vandalism on the Dublin Bus Fleet, with the fitting of 8-camera digital systems across the entire fleet to begin immediately.

An ambitious target date of the end of the year has been set, by which time almost all of the 1,070 strong fleet will be completed, the exceptions being buses which are scheduled for disposal in 2005/6.

"This new CCTV system is the single biggest action yet to tackling anti-social behaviour on Dublin Bus" the Minister commented. "With up to eight cameras on each bus, there will be no hiding place for those intent on vandalising buses."

"This is a bad day for the abusers and a bad day for vandals who want to take away from others what is a quality public transport system" he added.

Trials of digital camera systems had been carried out on several of the company's vehicles over the last few months, and the decision to equip the entire fleet was made before the London bombings, although the Minister commented that current security context demonstrated the value of such systems.

The Dublin Bus fleet contains a high proportion of double-deckers – 950 out of 1070 buses, and vandalism has become an increasing problem, along with antisocial behaviour on particular routes. Window-etching, virtually unknown in Dublin until very recently, has started to spread in some areas of the city, while rock-throwing at buses remains a problem, and will be targeted by a camera looking outside the bus.

A spokesperson for Dublin Bus welcomed the provision of funding from the department of transport, and indicated that the cameras would also aid the prosecution of smokers, who until now had frequently escaped prosecution due to lack of evidence.

Also speaking at the launch was Dr. John Lynch CIE Chairman who emphasised the important role that Dublin Bus plays for the city saying, "as we speak over 93% of the population of Dublin have access to Dublin Bus services and everyday 70% of all public transport users are travelling on Dublin Bus and because of this we take the responsibility of safety and security very seriously for both our customers and our staff".

BOMBING SUSPECT 'WAS NOT BUS DRIVER'

FIRST Group has denied that one of the suspects held in relation to the July 21 London attempted terrorist attacks is an employee of the company.

The Sun newspaper quoted an eyewitness to the police raids on Friday July 29 saying he recognised one of the arrested men as a driver of the number 7 bus. The number 7 runs between East Acton and the British Museum and is operated by First Centrewest.

A First spokesman said: "We have looked into this. None of the names of those arrested on Friday matches the name of any First employee."

Bob Coombes (left) and Roger Fossey, respectively managing director and finance director, led the successful Optare MBO team.

£11.8m MBO at Optare

OPTARE Group has been successfully acquired from North American Bus Industries (NABI) by its management team – following an £11.8m bid.

Led by managing director Bob Coombes, the MBO team included finance director Roger Fossey, technical director Glen Saint, aftersales director Paul Shepherd, materials director Brian Wiggins and plant director Colin Childs.

Optare had been part of NABI since 2000 and the move to acquire the business from its new owners was mounted after NABI's restructuring programme indicated it would need to shed a number of its assets.

Bob Coombes said: "This agreement means Optare's stakeholders – customers, employees, suppliers and other business partners – can be assured of total continuity for the future. The current management team will remain in place and steer Optare towards still greater success. It really is business as usual.

"My colleagues and I are committed to developing the business with its strong focus on product innovation, customer service and competitiveness and we are now free of external distractions to pursue that strategy.

"We had to fight off considerable competition to retain control of our business and as a team we are determined to continue to build on the recent success that has seen Optare significantly increase its UK market share and expand into Europe."

Financial support for the MBO was provided by HSBC, Optare's bankers for the past 12 years. HSBC ensured enhanced finance facilities to accommodate the transaction and advice on its structure came from Deloitte & Touche LLP.

Mr Coombes added: "I am pleased we were successful in raising the funding. In fact, we had several ways we could go. Eventually the bank Optare has been with for 12 years was the choice. That was particularly gratifying because HSBC didn't take 'no' for an answer, and set tough parameters. The management team has also, of course, put its hand in its pocket."

Mr Coombes revealed that, concurrent with the MBO, NABI and Optare have struck a deal to have the new Tempo single-deck bus manufactured under licence at its Hungarian factory. It is hoped that the arrangement will get left-hand drive Tempos across Western and Eastern Europe, but there are no plans for right-hand drive moving out of the Leeds factory, and Mr Coombes said the NABI product will not carry the Optare badge.

"It's something of a paradox that the MBO seems to have crystallised the business relationship we already had with NABI. I think that for NABI, it's a question of filling capacity, and serving the US export requirement, which has changed due to the dollar changes and restructuring. It's another string to NABI's bow."

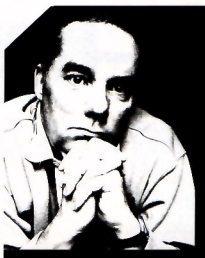
Russell Richardson, original founder of Optare in 1984, was a long term managing director and chairman of the company. Now a member of the NABI board of directors, he has worked to help restructure and rebuild NABI, both in the US and Hungary. He stepped down as Optare's non-executive chairman at the conclusion of the MBO.

He said: "While, for obvious reasons, I have been unable to participate in the transaction, I am delighted that Optare's future as an independent entity, controlled by its experienced and able management team, has been secured through this deal. There will be an ongoing relationship between Optare and NABI in a number of business areas and I look forward to maintaining contact with Bob and the team in the future.

"Optare still has considerable potential to realise and its ability to go on designing, making and selling advanced products is undiminished – not only in the UK market but also in mainland Europe. I wish the MBO team every success."

FACT FILE

1985	Founded with West Yorks Enterprise support
1989	Purchased assets of MCW including MetroRider
1990	Acquired by United Bus
1994	Re-acquired by management and employees following collapse of United Bus
1996	Acquired Autobus
2000	Acquired by NABI
2005	Acquired by MBO team



EDITOR'S COMMENT

It's training... or training

FROM last week's awareness session looking into the EU Training Directive (pages 20-21), it's clear some operators still haven't grasped the fact that the industry has Hobson's Choice.

New rules which will bring with them the burden of more driver training ARE on their way, and the only choice operators have is whether the industry chooses a new regime of training, or takes the option of six hours of tests... which will also require drivers to take additional training.

At the meeting, it was generally agreed that the PSV industry's favoured option would be the training option. It's the opinion of many operators that many drivers – especially those approaching retirement – may find the prospect of lengthy exams daunting, and find another job to do.

But the HGV industry seems to be favouring the examination option, which could be a huge problem for us. The blunt fact is that the much larger HGV industry and its powerful organisations have more clout than the PSV industry, and if the case presented by this industry isn't consistent and the arguments persuasive, we could end up with the unwanted option.

The Confederation of Passenger Transport can only do so much. I know the CPT will provide the industry with a route to the ears of ministers, and will make our case through the civil servants. However, the volume of their voice will be directly proportional to the feedback this industry provides.

Now is the time to commit words to paper. No matter how brief, responses to this directive will be the ammunition the CPT needs to make its case.

I genuinely believe that despite the costs the industry will have to bear beginning in 2008, additional training for drivers will come with some positives. The DSA's Mandy Lynch suggested at the meeting that it would be wrong for the industry to make training the scapegoat for recruitment problems, and I tend to agree.

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
EDITOR

LOTHIAN DRIVERS VOTE

1400 staff to walk out next week demanding 6.15% pay rise as executives

LOTHIAN buses is facing an all-out, continuous strike from Wednesday, August 10 after the company's Transport and General Workers' Union drivers rejected the latest pay offer.

The strike is a culmination of months of unrest between the drivers and the firm, which has already included an overtime ban and 24 and 48 hour strikes (see *CBW* 688). Lothian's 50 routes have been operating a Saturday service since the first action began in mid-June.

The drivers are holding out for a 6.15% condition-free pay rise taking their pay to £9 per hour. Lothian initially offered 4.2%, then 5%. TG&WU's stated eventual aim is for drivers' pay to reach £10 per hour.

Newspaper revelations of senior Lothian executive's pay and benefits rises on Tuesday, August 2 – of up to 31% or £44,000 per year in some cases – have not helped matters.

"The double standards are clear for all to see," says Sandy Smart, T&GWU regional industrial organiser. "It's about time the executives started earning their money by settling our claim. Our members know the consequences of their decision and the inevitable inconvenience to the Edinburgh public, businesses and, of course, themselves.

"Nobody opts for continuous strike action unless the situation is very serious. It must now be clear to Lothian that they are dealing with ordinary trade union members who feel they have been pushed to the brink. That's why they are fighting back."

Pilmar Smith, Lothian Buses chairman, says: "The decision to call an indefinite all-out strike is very disappointing, especially as, in total, only some 250 of Lothian's 1,400 drivers attended the meetings. A decision based on a show of hands at mass meetings attended by less than 18% of the drivers cannot be viewed as democratic."

Neil Renilson, Lothian Buses chief executive, added: "Two improved offers were made to the union over ten days ago, but the union is refusing to put these offers to a ballot of their members."

"We assume the refusal to hold a ballot is because the union believes the offers would be accepted, and the union are looking to prolong the dispute to try to obtain an even higher increase. I can see no other reason why the union would 'sit on' the improved offers and deny the drivers the

NEW PROFILES FOR STAGECOACH

STAGECOACH has ordered 25 of the first front-loading accessible coaches in the UK, from Plaxton.

The Profiles will be used on Stagecoach's interurban express services and will go into service later in 2005.

The new coaches are based on an otherwise standard Volvo B7R chassis, with a folding wheelchair lift in the main passenger entrance. The lifting gear has been specially adapted by Plaxton to fit the front entrance.

"In developing this innovative solution to carrying wheelchair passengers we were mindful of the need to make boarding and alighting as easy as possible, and to provide a vehicle which could be used with existing roadside infrastructure," says Kevin Wood, Plaxton sales director.

Seating layout has not been finalised yet, but each coach could carry up to 51 passengers.

This order is in addition to a batch of conventional Profiles delivered in March 2005, for use in north-east Scotland.

HEAVY DUTY

HEAVY Duty Parts has streamlined its sales operations to make it easier to do business in the Irish Republic.

New software allows the company to invoice its Irish customers in Euros and payments can now be made through the AIB Bank in Dublin. Heavy Duty already banks with the Dresdner Bank in Ger-

GLOBAL NEWS

Sweden

VOLVO's Distribution Concept Vehicle (DCV), first introduced in October 2004 – a joint project between Volvo Truck's Nordic market organisation, TFK, the Transport Research Institute in Sweden and operator Schenker Akeri AB – has been branded a success. Based on a Volvo B12M bus chassis the DCV (below) was developed to make the distribution of parcels and goods more efficient while improving

the working environment for drivers. Now in daily operations with Schenker it has proved popular with drivers and scores heavily as an efficient delivery vehicle. Saffle Karosseri built the cab and body and it was assembled by Swedish Firebus in Arvika.

● HALF-YEAR results for Scania show its operating income rose by 16% to around SEK 3,500m (£256.6m). Operating margins also increased 11.5% and net income matched operating income – up 16% to SEK 2,316m (£169.8m). Scania president Leif Ostling said despite uncertain economic development in western Europe, Scania's main market, order bookings for vehicles were largely unchanged but deliveries had risen 9% - thanks to a strong Nordic market. Although European markets had weakened, Scania marginally increased its share from 13% to 13.5%.

France

VOLVO Truck Corporation has been acquitted from a criminal trial concerning the 1999 Mont Blanc Tunnel fire where 39 lives were lost. The company was found 'not guilty' on all charges. Volvo Truck Corporation faced charges over possible causes of the fire – along with 16 other parties. Lars Lidman, senior vice president and general counsel at Volvo Truck Corporation, said: "We trust what is learned from the investigations will help to ensure safety measures are implemented to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again."

Germany

DAIMLER-CHRYSLER chairman Prof. Jurgen Schrempp is to leave the company at the end of the year. Prof. Schrempp has been with DaimlerChrysler for 44 years but he leaves without a pay-off and two years before his contract expires. News of his departure saw the company's share price increase by 9%. The newly appointed chairman is Dr. Dieter Zetsche (left), currently head of the Chrysler group, who will assume the role at DaimlerChrysler AG from January 1, 2006, for a period of five years. His current post will be filled by Tom LaSorda, now chief operating officer of Chrysler Group.

USA

IN an unusual 'new-for-old' exercise a small operator in the USA has found it practicable to give superannuated buses a new lease of life. The City of Elk Grove, in the Sacramento region of California, is now using a fleet of 17 buses which have been converted to hybrid-electric drive. The project has involved the rebuilding and total overhaul of 14-year old Gillig Phantom buses which were given a new gasoline-electric driveline incorporating the well-known ThunderVolt technology by ISE.

FOR STRIKE

pocket an extra £44,000 per year

opportunity to vote on them."

Lothian buses refused to make any further comment.

As we went to press, all the other driver/ bus company disputes going on around the country (see *CBW* 688), involving First Devon and Cornwall, Transport for London, Stagecoach Northwest and First Cymru, were ongoing.

HAS LUCK OF THE IRISH

many so the transfer of euros from Ireland to its German bank will also cut the cost of conversion fees.

In addition the company has announced a joint venture with Business Post, part of Federal Express – it now costs just €17.50 for a next day service up to 15kg.

"I see this move as the start of a great future between Heavy Duty Parts and its Irish customers, old and new," says Kevin Booth, director of Heavy duty Parts. "It will enable the expansion of Heavy Duty and help implement the real cost savings for Irish operators that UK customers have enjoyed for some time."

Heavy Duty specialise in spare parts for Setra, Neoplan and Mercedes-Benz.

STILL in the US, Optare parent North American Bus Industries (NABI) continues to receive large orders for CNG-fuelled buses. The latest contracts call for 70 of the company's 40-LFW and ten 60-BRT articulated transit buses. Californian operator Foothill Transit, based in West Covina, and the Regional Public Transportation Authority of Mesa, Arizona, have ordered CNG-fuelled low-floor 40ft buses from NABI – both companies already operate NABI CNG buses. Some 33 new 60-BRT buses have already been delivered to the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and has a further 167 on order – the bulk for LA Metro and six for Los Angeles World Airports.

Morocco

HISPANO Carrocera has won its largest ever bus order through its subsidiary Hispano Maghreb. The company has confirmed a deal to supply 800 urban buses to M'Dina Bus, Casablanca's urban transport operator.

A Hispano and Tata Motors Limited team comprising Gerardo Múgica, chief executive of Hispano Carrocera,. Andrés Múgica, chief operating officer, Hicham Benmira, managing director of Hispano Maghreb, and Ujjal Mukherjee, of Tata Motors, met the Prime Minister of Morocco on July 15 – where he expressed his thanks to the company for bringing in superior European quality buses to Morocco, which he said would enhance the image of public transportation in Casablanca

China

THREE fuel cell-powered Mercedes-Benz Citaros are to be delivered to the city of Beijing in September. The buses were officially handed over to city officials attending the DaimlerChrysler bus and coach plant in Mannheim earlier this month. Once the vehicles and their support teams have been installed they will begin operating a specially devised service along a 19km route which takes in the Summer Palace and the site for the 2008 Olympic Games.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Find out about fund

THE Centre for Transport Policy is holding a one day conference called 'Transport Innovation Fund: Radical Solutions to Transport Problems' in September. The fund exists to encourage local authorities and PTEs to develop "innovative, bold and coherent" transport policies, and will reach £2bn by 2012. Bus operators are being encouraged to attend to gain the inside track on how to form partnerships with local authorities and gain access to the fund. The event will be held at the CBI Conference Centre, at Centre Point in London on Tuesday, September 20 and costs £395. For more info, call 01224 263134.

Irisbus scoops award

IRISBUS has won both the Spanish Bus of the Year and Coach of the Year titles, the first manufacturer to do so. The bus award went to the CityClass CNG bus, fitted with City.Versus bodywork by Castrosua and the coach title was won by the Cursor 10-powered EuroRider C43 SRI with New Century bodywork by Irizar. Irisbus Iberica leads all Spanish market segments, with a market share of 29% in vehicles over 3.5 tonnes.

Night bus withdrawn

THE Shepway 'Nite Rider' weekend bus service in Folkestone, operated by Stagecoach East Kent, has been withdrawn before the end of its pilot phase because Kent police were unable to provide an officer to accompany the bus. The service was reported to be having a positive effect on late night problems in the town and the local council says it may try to resurrect it.

Tune in to Radio 4

BOTH the CPT and PTEG have been interviewed for a Radio 4 current affairs programme investigating alleged failings in the UK bus industry. The makers of 'File on Four' say they have uncovered evidence of 'poor reliability, safety failings and a regulatory system that is struggling to cope'. The programme will be broadcast at 8pm on Tuesday, August 9.

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Protest over Lake District price hike

Operators threaten to boycott Keswick in parking row

Andrew Peace, reporter

OPERATORS are threatening to boycott Keswick in the Lake District unless the local authorities make adequate coach parking facilities available. The existing parking facilities have been priced out of the market, and a municipal coach park, some way out of town, has only four spaces.

Operators used to park at Booth's supermarket in the town until the price was doubled to £15, even for dropping off and picking up, in June. Skiddaw Hotel in the town centre has been "bending over backwards" to provide spaces but does not have the capacity to accommodate everybody.

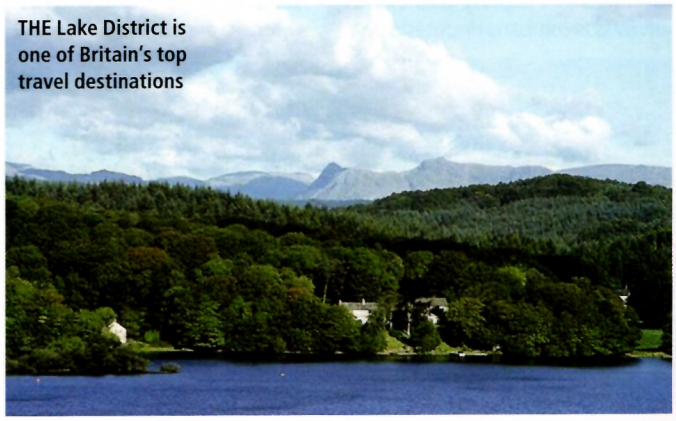
The Keswick Tourist Association is meeting with the supermarket this week in an effort to get them to reconsider the price rise, but both the CPT and operators feel that this is missing the point.

"Booth's supermarket is entitled to charge as much as they want for parking. They are a commercial enterprise... it is up to the council," says Ian Ashman, of A&J Coaches, for whom Keswick is a regular destination. "If Keswick is not careful, operators will go elsewhere, like Bowness where they have made a big effort for coaches."

Bob Pilbeam, CPT parking consultant, picks up the point: "Allerdale Borough Council is not even acknowledging that the lack of parking is their responsibility – it is up to them to provide facilities of some sort, there is not even a drop off or pick up site."

Allerdale Borough Council says it cannot be held responsible for the charges made by Booths, and that it does provide coach parking spaces – just four for the "dozens and dozens" of coaches that use the town every day according to Mr Ashman.

A council spokeswoman continues: "The problem is that there is no other suitable land available and getting planning permission might prove difficult because of the planning requirements set by the Lake District National Park Authority."



THE Lake District is one of Britain's top travel destinations

Asked how seriously the council is taking the problem in a town that is heavily dependent on tourism, the spokeswoman said: "We are committed to tourism, and we are talking to various parties to finds a solution. The problem is to get everybody round a table at the same time – the problem only came up about six weeks ago which in council terms is a very short time span."

She does not hold out much hope that Allerdale Council will be able to find even a compromise solution: "A set down and pick up point would be the responsibility of the county council as it involves the highways."

A spokesman for Cumbria County Council was unavailable for comment at the time of going to press.

EU: 'Go digital by December'

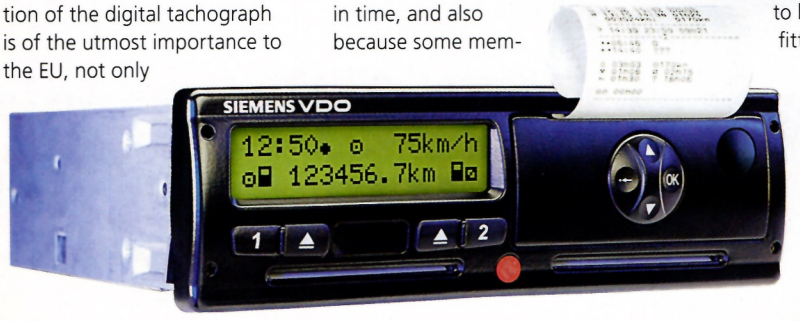
THE vice president of the EU has written to Alistair Darling MP, secretary of State for Transport, to clarify the EU's position on digital tachographs.

The letter, seen exclusively by *CBW*, underlines the EU's determination to see the new fitment of the device made mandatory by December 31, 2005, the third different date

"The commission is of the opinion that the rapid introduction of the digital tachograph is of the utmost importance to the EU, not only for the enforcement of driving and rest times of professional drivers but also for the improvement of road safety and the guarantee of fair competition," says Jacques Barrot, EU vice president.

Originally intended to come into force on August 5, 2004, a one year extension was granted because the tachograph manufacturers could not get the equipment ready in time, and also because some member states had not taken all the legislative, technical and administrative measures needed.

As of the August 5, 2005 deadline, some member states had not yet finished the legal work and the Commission granted a further five month extension to prevent drivers of foreign vehicles facing penalties for driving without a digital tachograph. After this date, all new vehicles have to have the device fitted.



The EU wants digital tachos to be fitted in new vehicles by the end of the year

Subsidies capped

HAMPSHIRE County Council has capped bus subsidies after re-tenders showed an average 8% increase just to maintain existing services. The maximum subsidy available for 2005/06 will be £2.50 per passenger journey, or £2 for Sunday or evening services.

Local operator Solent Blue Line does not expect the changes to have much effect on its business: "It's not a nice thing to be happening, it will take away a fair amount of Sunday and evening miles, but we expect the effect on us to be largely neutral," says director Phil Stockley. "We have some ideas about how we can rescue some parts of the package and Eastleigh Borough Council, particularly, has a very positive approach."

'School specials' which require more than £2.50 subsidy are unaffected. The council has been paying up to £10 subsidy per passenger journey.

Blue Bus to ride again?

ARRIVA has paid £2.9m for the assets of Blue Bus and Coaches of Bolton, as predicted in *CBW* (see *CBW* 689). But Roger Jarvis, proprietor and founder of Blue Bus, holds on to the company name, and its depots in Eccles and Bolton.

All vehicles, staff and routes will transfer to Arriva. The contract was signed on July 27 and became effective on July 31. Arriva will run the timetable unchanged until further notice, but will relocate services and employees three miles from the Eccles depot to its central Manchester depot within the next few weeks.

Jarvis retains the capability of resurrecting the company at some stage but is not contemplating a return in the near future. A spokesman for the company says, "I don't think he will be back in the foreseeable future, I think he wants to put his feet up for the time being. Instead of being rented to Blue Bus, the depots will be rented to Arriva Northwest."

The other two members of the Jarvis family working for Blue Bus, Ben and Andrew Jarvis, will transfer to Arriva in management roles.

The Blue Bus vehicles were rebranded as Arriva from 1st August, and will be repainted by the end of 2005.

Blue Bus was established some 14 years ago, providing services in and around Bolton and to Manchester city centre. Blue Bus ran 86 vehicles and employed 218 people.

● ARRIVA has also paid £9.4m for an 80% stake in Italian operator Savda. The business operates public, commercial, contract and private hire bus services in Northern Italy. The sale should be completed in the fourth quarter of 2005, while the deal contains an option allowing Arriva to buy the remaining 20% for around £3.2m in 2008.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Roadworks warning

COACH operators travelling to the south are being warned about major roadworks on the A35 between Southampton and Christchurch starting in September. The work will take four months and leave the three mile stretch of road near Holmsley in the New Forest completely closed at times. The official diversion route will be the A337 via Lymington, with a slight variation for vehicles over 4.3m.

Yorkshire's £43m plan

WEST Yorkshire PTA approved £43m worth of public transport improvements in the region last week as part of the authority's second Local Transport Plan (LTP2). The money will pay for new and improved bus stations, a new railway station with park-and-ride facilities, 33 new AccessBus vehicles, upgrades to CCTV coverage and better passenger information. It relates to the period 2006-2011. The plan now goes to the Department for Transport for approval. Visit the website *www.wyltp.com* for more details.

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We also visit Auschwitz - said to be one of the most moving experiences. Possibly the best preserved of Hitler's death camps, it bears silent testimony to the horror of the genocide that is within the living memory of many coach tour passengers.

Krakow itself has plenty to offer, as a short tour of the city will demonstrate, but you can hear it from the horse's mouth during a visit to a local coach operator who will answer your questions about the attractions and what he can offer if you decide you might run fly-coach city tours.

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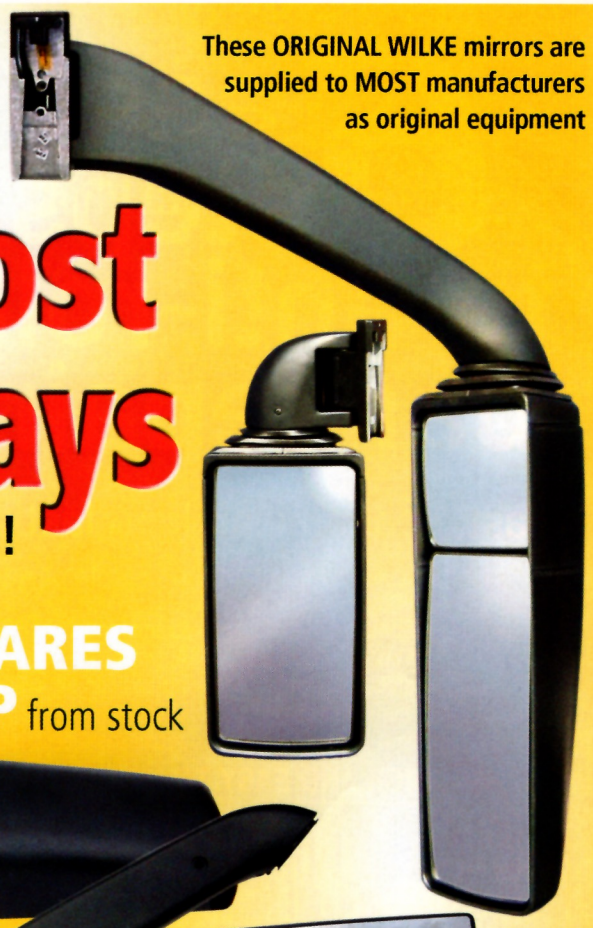

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FEELING THE FORCE

New £3 million G Force ride has larger seats and unique hip restraints

A NEW roller coaster at Drayton Manor has tipped the balance in favour of larger thrill-seekers by being fitted with outsized seats.

The "big boy seats" mean that adrenalin junkies of all sizes will be able to enjoy the £3million G Force ride, which opened at the Staffordshire theme park last week. G4, the pop opera quartet from the last series of ITV's X-Factor, were the special guests at the opening ceremony.

The roller coast does away with traditional shoulder restraints and pins riders in their seats at the hip, leaving the rest of the body free. The design has been hailed as revolutionary and riders experience G forces of 4.3 while travelling at speeds in excess of 40mph.

The move to accommodate larger aficionados has been welcomed by Andy Hine, the chairman of the Roller Coaster Club of Great Britain, who said the new seats were a world first, apart from a prototype in Germany.

He said: "I have a lot of club members who are larger and get very upset when they queue for two hours only to be told they cannot get on a ride.

"I think the designers are doing the right thing. I have seen the embarrassment it causes when people who are not necessarily large or obese get to a ride and cannot do up the belt.

"The general size of people is getting bigger and at last someone is addressing that from a leisure point of view. These are the first specially designed 'big boy seats' in the world."

Helen O'Neill, a spokeswoman for Drayton Manor, said: "We are having to design bigger seating arrangements for bigger people. We appear to be going the same way as America."

G Force will feature one 'big boy seat', which has a wider locking mechanism and bigger surface area, in the back row of the two trains.

BRUSH UP ON FRENCH FAM TRIP

THE Coach Tourism Council is running a fam trip to discover the painters and artists of the Paris Isle de France region from September 9 to 11. The aim is not only to show the historic and artistic importance of the region but also to give operators an insight into the practical aspects of organising group tours to the area.

Return ferry crossings will be by SeaFrance and the first night will be spent in the Novotel Ury in the forest of Fontainbleau. Saturday's itinerary will take in Barbizon, where there will be a painting class, lunch, a chateau visit, cheese tasting and a visit to the medieval town of Moret-sur-Loing, the home of the English impressionist Alfred Sisley. Overnight will be in either the Novotel Cergy Pontoise or Novotel Maffliers in the northeast of Paris. Sunday's itinerary will include a visit to Van Gogh's home in Auvers-sur-Oise and lunch in a chateau, followed by an evening crossing home.

Bookings are limited to two people from any one company and the trip costs £50 for the first person and £75 for the second.

■ For more information and a booking form, contact Jean Avery-Smith at the Coach Tourism Council on 01227 762200 fax: 01227 762006.

DATE WITH CHANNEL TOURISM

RESORTS, hotels, attractions and other supplies from across southeast England and the holiday coasts of northern France and Belgium will be showcasing their products to UK and European travel trade buyers at the 2005 Channel Tourism and Leisure Showcase in Folkestone on Thursday, September 15.

The event, which is organised by the Folkestone-based Channel Chamber of Commerce, was launched successfully last year and aims to raise travel trade awareness of the potential of Channel region destinations for short breaks, touring, days out and event-based business.

The Discover Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh tourism marketing partnership is playing a leading role in attracting exhibitors and visitors – it already is working with resorts and towns in Nord Pas de Calais and Flanders to develop two-way cross-Channel tourism. The one-day showcase will include product presentations and marketing advice sessions as well as other events.

■ For more information, and an invitation, call 01303 270022 or email: *info@channelchamber.co.uk*

TUNBRIDGE GOES CONTINENTAL

TRADITIONAL French and Italian markets are among the attractions await groups who are planning visits to Tunbridge Wells this year.

The Kent town is noted for its fine architecture, including The Pantiles, where the markets will be staged.

Specialist Italian traders will be setting up more than 25 stalls there from September 23 to 25, while the area will be transformed into a French boulevard from October 14 to 16 when stallholders will be selling foodstuffs from fresh baguettes to ripe cheese.

The markets apart, The Pantiles has a range of specialist shops and antique stores, restaurants and outdoor entertainment. Throughout August there are outdoor jazz evenings on Thursdays, antique and book fares in September and October and ice skating and street entertainment from December 2 to 4.

■ For more information, contact the Tourist Information Centre on 01892 515675

FREE TOLL OFFER EXPANDED

ROADCHEF, the service station operator, has expanded its free M6 Toll offer to three more service area locations.

The offer has been running since early this year and is proving very popular with coach drivers, who can save the £7 cost of the toll fee.

Coach drivers who call in with their passengers can now collect their travel voucher from Sandbach, Stafford, Norton Canes or Watford Gap service areas.

They then fill it in and hand it in at the booth to qualify for free travel on the toll road.

INQUIRY HALTED OVER CONFLICT OF EVIDENCE

Under-fire operator given more time to get his case in order

A COMPLICATED tale of mistakes and errors of procedure came to an abrupt halt, as an apparent conflict of evidence arose, bringing a public inquiry into a Greater Manchester coach operator to an adjournment.

The inquiry had heard that Hollins Travel of Bury would by right require a new licence, but the Traffic Commissioner granted an adjournment to revise the calling in letter, and give the applicant time to update his case.

North Western Traffic Commissioner Beverley Bell said that it was clear that the operator was no longer trading according to its licence, and that the old licence would have to cease. She said that its was not automatic that she would issue a new licence, and in the circumstances, that she was unlikely to accept the surrender of the old licence.

Proprietor Craig Robert Jones trading as Hollins Travel of 455 Bury New Road, Prestwich, Greater Manchester faced a public inquiry at the new Office of the Traffic Commissioner, Stone Cross Place, Golborne, Warrington, to consider regulatory action, resulting from unsatisfactory maintenance investigations, an apparent failure to comply with statements of fact and undertakings given, a material change in that it appeared that convictions had been recorded against the licence, tachograph offences, prohibitions, and concern regarding professional repute of the transport manager, professional competence and financial standing.

Opening proceedings, Andrew Woolfall, representing the applicant said that it was clear that a new operators licence was required. Mr Jones' business was incorporated in April 2004, and he was advised at the time, by his accountant, who claimed to be a former employee of VOSA, that a new licence was not required, as Mr Jones was still the sole owner. "Clearly, I have advised that this is incorrect, and a new application has been lodged."

"Mr Jones has realised that the business has grown beyond his capability, and his mother and father would like to join the business and invest a substantial amount of money. Mr Jones is booked on a CPC course and will take his national exam on September 9, and his mother plans to take the CPC exam next year."

WHAT THE INSPECTOR SAID:

Evidence from Mohammed Sadique, a vehicle examiner attached to the Vehicle Inspectorate Division of the VOSA enforcement office at Chadderton Goods Vehicle Testing Station was accepted without question. Mr Sadique described an unannounced maintenance investigation at the operating centre at Brickhouse Farm, Griffe Lane, Unsworth, Bury, on 14th April 2005. The maintenance investigation was requested by the Traffic Commissioners office as a follow up from an unsatisfactory maintenance investigation and a Public Inquiry statement submitted.

Two coaches were examined – a 49 seat Dennis Javelin and an Iveco Beulas 49 seat coach – and both were found to be in a satisfactory condition, with nil defect inspection notices being issued to both vehicles.

He said that the preventative maintenance inspections and repairs are carried out by an outside contractor, and the operator informed him that he had changed his maintenance provider since the last visit. The vehicle preventative maintenance inspection records were examined, but they were incomplete, with mileage and signatures missing off some of the PMI sheets. He also said that the stated PMI inspection frequency of six weeks was being stretched to four months. There was a forward-planner in place at the time of this maintenance investigation, and the PMI dates marked on this planner did correspond with dates entered on some of the PMI sheets made available.

> 'Why did you fail to respond to two warning letters?'
>
> - Beverley Bell

WHAT THE OPERATOR SAID:

Giving evidence, Mr Jones said he had set up the business in October 1996, when he bought a coach, and a school contract from the company he worked for. Initially he undertook school contracts and private hires, and the business grew to two coaches, then three and now six, with British and continental tours being undertaken, mainly for Alfa Tours and pilgrimage work for Options. He formed a limited company in April 2004, and said he now felt quite stupid, because he was given bad advice and didn't think of phoning the Traffic Area Office.

He said George Ribchester ceased being transport manager in January 2004. He was replaced by Kieran Hindle, who was also a driver with Blue Bus, and came up to the garage for up to 20 hours per week to check a selection of tachographs and inspection sheets. He admitted a failing on his part in not informing the Traffic Commissioner of the change for over a year.

On maintenance, he said that he was now using Freebird Fleet Services of Bury, which was a coach operator with a separate maintenance side. The garage had a copy of his forward planner, and at every second inspection the vehicle would go for roller brake testing at Chadderton test station. Mr Jones outlined an unhappy history of maintenance contractors, who were usually sole traders and were poor at providing inspection sheets. Following discussions with Mr Sadique, some of the missing records had been found, and a nil defect system was in place from

January 2005. He had recently bought the VOSA video, and had arranged to employ Grahame Robinson, a transport consultant, to arrange a training course for all drivers to instruct them on their responsibilities.

WHAT THE TRAFFIC COMMISSIONER SAID:

Cross-examining, Mrs Bell asked Mr Jones, why he didn't make a simple phone call to the Traffic Area office to say "I'm thinking of going limited, do I need to change my licence?", and why he waited from January 2004 to January 2005 to inform them that Mr Ribchester had left, and what prompted him to say "By the way, I became limited". Mr Jones replied that he had trusted his accountant and it wasn't until January 2005 that industry colleagues told him to change the legal lettering. "So you were operating for eight months with the wrong legal lettering" said Mrs Bell.

Regarding his maintenance history, Mrs Bell pointed out unsatisfactory maintenance investigations in July 2001 and July 2002, and warning letters of September 2001 and September 2002 and March 2003, and undertakings given that a nil defect system would be put in place from 2001. "Why did you fail to respond to two warning letters?" she asked.

Mr Jones said that he didn't know. He said that he was constantly on the back of drivers to fill in defect sheets. "I've drummed it into them that many times....I've done a letter to them...I go round checking with them" he said.

Mrs Bell asked him what he wanted to say about his repute, and Mr Jones said that he appreciated that in the past there were failings. "We haven't followed up on letters that you sent us, and we expanded that quickly, that we didn't keep up with the business. But now we are trying to put that right with a monthly audit from Mr Robinson."

"You've only done this because of the Public Inquiry." said Mrs Bell, "You need a licence, and this has made you stop and think."

"This has frightened me to death" said Mr Jones, "I want to do everything correctly. This has not come to me suddenly, but delegating some things to my parents will help me to concentrate on what I need to."

Mrs Bell issued a cautionary warning. "The licence will only be granted if you have the proper arrangements, and I have to look at your past history. You as an operator do not seem to have displayed a willingness to comply."

Kieran Hindle gave evidence as Traffic Manager, being a CPC holder since 1993, and explained he worked full time as a driver with Blue Bus, which meant working four days per week. He explained that because of this, in some weeks he did not put in the full 20 hours that Mr Jones had spoken of. "I have really tried, to the best of my ability to make sure we have operated as closely as we can to the letter of the law. It has been a long process, but we are getting our act together."

Cross examined by the traffic commissioner, Mr Hindle said that his role was to help and advise on the running of the company, and to check inspection forms and tachographs. He did drive for the company, although he may have helped out on three or four occasions.

Mrs Bell then produced an application form for Hollins Travel dated September 2002 applying for an increase in authorisation from three to six vehicles and an upgrading from a National Licence to an International Licence. "Why did you sign this form as traffic manager?" she asked. Mr Hindle examined the form and said "This looks like my signature, but I can't remember the form."

Mrs Bell advised the parties to take a break, because of the conflict of evidence which could produce a conflict of interest.

After the break, Mr Woolfall said that there may be an innocent explanation, but he would like an adjournment to make further inquiries of his clients.

Mrs Bell then said that she would like to see all parties in the second week of August for an update and directions, and would set a date for the reconvened inquiry in September.

"This is not an effective defect reporting system, and I am quite concerned about maintenance frequencies" she said. "I am also concerned about how Mr Jones can effectively control his business, when he is out on the road four or five days per week."

"Between now and then, I am content to let the licence continue in its present form, providing all the drivers and Mr Jones attend the scheduled training session on Monday 25 July, and I need an undertaking to that effect."

OTHER DECISIONS

NORTH WESTERN TRAFFIC AREA

LANCASTER, June 22, 2005
Pilkingtons (Accrington) Ltd, Accrington
Action: PSV - S14 - Application refused

MERSEYSIDE, June 28, 2005
John Marshall Hardern T/A Jubilee Quality Cars, Wintaston, Crewe
Action: PSV - S17 - Licence revoked with immediate effect
PSV - S28 - John Marshall Harden disqualified with immediate effect for an indefinite period.

SCOTTISH TRAFFIC AREA

EDINBURGH, April 28, 2005
John A Hunter T/A Hunter's Executive Coaches, Sauchie Alloa
Action: PSV - S17 - Condition varied by reducing the vehicle authority from 12 to ten vehicles with effect from 23.59 on July 17 2005 for five weeks.
PSV - S26 - Condition attached that prohibits the registering of any new local services for a period of 6 months from 23.59 on July 17 2005.
PSV - S17 - No findings made in respect of financial standing.

EDINBURGH, June 16, 2005
Iain David Smith T/A Liberton Travel, Dalkeith
Action: PSV - S17 - Licence suspended for four days from 23:59 on August 7 2005.

WEST MIDLANDS TRAFFIC AREA

BIRMINGHAM, July 13, 2005
Sukwant Thandi T/A St Buses, Smethwick, West Midlands
Action: As announced, the Deputy Traffic Commissioner's decision is as follows:
- that Mr Sukwant Thandi's good repute as an operator and transport manager is not lost but is stained;
- that the number of vehicles authorised under the licence is to be reduced to four vehicles from August 1 2005 until 30th September 2005 inclusive.

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To... mark.williams@emap.com

Cc... The Editor, *CBW*, Emap Active, Bretton Court, Bretton, Peterborough, PE3 8DZ

'IT'S AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN'

From: Ian Smith
Professional Transport Advice Services, Exeter, Devon

I attach a copy of a letter recently sent to the Directors of Moto Hospitality.

The content is self-explanatory and unauthorised parking has long been a 'gripe' of drivers.

There appears to be a contributory liability issue in the event of an injury if service areas do not police their designated coach parking areas - I am interested in the views of our legal-minded readers.

I hope no driver will ever have occasion to need to refer to the fact that the potential has been brought to site owners' attention but you may care to publish just in case.

Let us hope our combined efforts can avoid any such injury or claim.

I am awaiting a reply from Moto...

Dear Directors,

I work as an expert witness allied to the road transport and legal professions.

I also drive commercial vehicles and have observed the following potential liability issue when using many of your sites.

Your sites have designated parking areas for public service vehicles / 'coaches' which display notices to this effect.

Unfortunately on many occasions coaches are faced with myriads of alternate vehicles using their designated areas.

On the morning of Sunday, July 24 I was faced with a combination of over 40 cars, cars and caravans, articulated semi-trailers minus their tractor units in the designated coach area at your Exeter Services.

As a consequence I was unable to park in any of the marked spaces and forced to disembark / transfer my passengers amongst passing traffic. Fortunately there were no incidents.

I brought the unauthorised parking and coach difficulties to the attention of the duty manager, who whilst sympathising clearly had a revenue issue as her priority.

Moto are keen for coach drivers to bring their passengers into your sites throughout the year, yet little appears to be done to make their life easier, especially at busy times. Stress free and uncongested parking will go a long way in this regard.

Moto have long written, in their coach driver circulations, about supervision of the coach parks to entice / encourage us to use their facilities.

I know that no 'coach driver' would deliberately cause injury to any pedestrian within the coach parking area, but am concerned that the presence of excited children and parents from unauthorised vehicles parked within the designated coach parking area is "an accident waiting to happen".

I am in no doubt, from my years in the Courtroom, that the legal profession will make much of the 'coaches only' signing at the entrance to the designated areas. At the present time they would be able produce many thousands of coach driver witnesses to confirm a total lack of parking supervision by the company responsible. Contributory liability, I believe, is the expression used – "a prohibitory sign not policed, is not a sign at all".

I hope this letter will go someway to preventing just such a tragedy as foreseen above. Please keep your designated coach parking for coaches and their associated support vehicles.

I am copying this correspondence to CBW to remind drivers of the need for extra care within congested service area coaching parking areas particularly during the holiday period.

I hope between us we can ensure safer coach parking facilities at your sites, which can only benefit us all.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Smith

LETTER OF THE WEEK

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FRENCH FAUX PAS

From: Stuart Duddy
Farnborough, Hampshire

HAVING read the Finistère feature is the July 2005 *Out & About* supplement I feel it is necessary to correct the reference relating to the shipping forecast area.

Firstly, there is no link between the French département of Finistère and the shipping forecast area formerly known by the same name. The area known as 'Finistere' was renamed 'Fitzroy' in 2002, in recognition of Captain Robert Fitzroy, Charles Darwin's companion on the 'Beagle' and who became the first director of the Met Office.

Secondly, Finistère (literally meaning 'end of the land') did not refer to the north-west peninsula of France. Area Fitzroy is located to the west of Area Biscay and its only contact with land is with the north-west corner of Spain.

The French département of Finistère is actually bordered by two shipping areas - Plymouth to the north and Biscay to the south.

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MBOs: On the ro

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OWNER-MANAGED and small medium enterprises (SMEs) represent nearly two-thirds of all UK business activity. Inevitably there will come a time when those at the helm of owner-managed businesses will need to consider succession planning and the possibility of stepping down.

Management buy-outs (MBOs) are widely recognised as an alternative to a third party sale and present an opportunity for the second tier management team to own and run their own business. Indeed, many departing owners would prefer to sell to the second tier management team as a reward for their service over the years in building a successful business rather than to a trade purchaser.

The trade sale may realise more money but owner managers are often concerned about the trade purchaser asset-stripping and dismantling all that has been built up.

So, which sources of finance do these second tier management teams go to in order to raise the necessary funding for these type of transactions?

Institutional funding

HISTORICALLY, the success rates of management buyouts with institutional funding have been encouraging, however, management teams are often concerned at the amount of control that may be exerted by the new venture capital (VC) partner. Many transactions have a representative from the VC sitting on the board of the new entity. There is a concern that the 'monthly controls,' which may be rightly required by this new investor, might significantly impact upon working practices in terms of flexibility, speed of decision-making and the assessment and completion of acquisitions.

There is also the perception that private equity funds are too rigid in terms of their funding structure and exit strategy.

Companies who consider that the drawbacks of external equity investment outweigh the benefits, may feel that a management buy-out, acquisition, or even secondary buy-out where the management team retains 100% of the equity rather than giving any away to a third-party VC, is more appropriate. A number of companies therefore look to asset based lenders (ABL).

Asset based lenders

AN ABL will typically provide funding against all of the assets on a balance sheet including stock, debtors, plant and machinery and freehold property. The facility will usually come in two forms:

- a revolving facility, similar to bank overdraft, with availability changing daily as debtors and stock levels vary. Funding against debtors is usually via an invoice discounting facility, but companies can outsource their sales ledger management by opting for a factoring arrangement; and
- a term loan, based upon the professional valuation of a company's fixed assets.

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AD TO SUCCESSION

another in their series of articles on business strategy

equity than traditional lenders, more important to them is the quality of the assets.

Investors and loan providers will normally undertake extensive commercial, financial and legal due diligence to confirm the merits of the business. Depending on the outcome of the due diligence, certain terms may have to be varied and negotiated. Furthermore, during the lifetime of the relationship, regularly reviews of the companies systems and assets funded should be expected.

The role of corporate finance advisers in the fundraising process is a vital one, not only because of their experience in raising finance from VCs and debt financiers, but also because of their knowledge of certain sectors and family owned businesses.

In order to assist a smooth transaction it is important that vendors groom the businesses for sale to the second tier management by handing over key customer and supplier contacts in order to establish new relationships and encourage the management team to play a more active role in the business.

In addition, there may well be a need to strengthen the management team with an outside investor or non-executive director.

■ For further information or to discuss other issues affecting your business, contact Paul Fussell (*paf@hazlewoods.co.uk*) or David Main (*dgm@hazlewoods.co.uk*) on 01452 634800. Website *www.hazlewoods.co.uk/Bus_Coach*

This article has been prepared as a guide to topics of current financial interest. We strongly recommend you take professional advice before making decisions on matters discussed here. No responsibility for any loss to any person acting as a result of this material can be accepted by us.

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THE TRAINING NOW ARR

An awareness session made it clear to operators that Europe's driver training directive isn't going to go away, and will have a fundamental impact on costs. Mark Williams went to see what all the fuss is about

OPERATORS who haven't already got a formal training programme will have their hands forced by the European Training Directive which comes into force in September 2008.

At an awareness session staged jointly by the Driving Standards Agency, Confederation of Passenger Transport and GoSkills, delegates were told a sea change is unavoidable but that the impact may not be as great as some have suggested.

A consultation being run by the DSA is not asking operators whether they want the legislation, but which option for improving standards they'd prefer. One option is to have a scheme of formal exams for drivers to demonstrate that the training is complete, the other sets out the length and type of training each driver will get, with a written or oral test to show it has worked.

An on-form Steven Salmon, operations director for the CPT, said the directive was a real bombshell: "The Euro law-making machine is like a big factory," he began. "It's the end product of someone's question 'Wouldn't it be a good idea if....'

"The thinking is driven by the fact that the driving profession doesn't enjoy the level of respect it deserves. It says 'just because you passed your test 25 years ago doesn't make you into a good driver now.

"And with amazing speed, out came the directive. It doesn't necessarily suit the UK. We have a dynamic labour market in which drivers have an easy come, easy go relationship with the industry. Under this new directive, we will have to think more carefully about who we take on because a high turnover of drivers will be very expensive."

THE DSA'S VIEW

Mandy Lynch, policy manager

MANDY LYNCH, the DSA's policy manager, told delegates there's an 80% overlap between current driving standards and the new driver 'CPC' standard.

"I see no point in doing two lots of training. If current training ticks the boxes in the directive, there's no reason why it may not count for the CPC," she said.

Mrs Lynch said all drivers, including D1 minibus drivers, are in scope, the only exemptions being drivers of vehicles with an 'authorised' speed of 45kph or lower, the armed forces, drivers of road testing vehicles, drivers taking lessons, drivers on non-commercial business, and 'incidental' drivers.

> 'The Euro law-making machine is like a big factory'
>
> *Steven Salmon*

Incidental drivers are those whose job is not driving, but need to drive vehicles occasionally, such as engineers. Asked by a delegate, she said engineers who drive commercially at weekends are in scope.

In favour of the examination option (see right) she said the four hours required could include formal written or oral exams, as are currently used in the driving test. She said the two-hour practical test could include a short exam, and pointed out that the current PCV qualification already includes a 90-minute driving test: "There is already an element of show me/tell me in the current PCV test," she said.

Mrs Lynch said the training option allowed five years for documented training to take place, and would include a theory test covering the directive's 17 objectives (see right) only for new drivers. Grandfather rights exist for current PCV licence holders, but they will still have to take documented training and get their CPC before the end of the five-year period.

"But drivers and operators must understand that if the driver is not qualified by 2013, he or she will lose their right to drive," she warned.

Your drivers will need one of these...

THE TRAINING AGENCY'S VIEW

Vicki Ball, director of workforce development, GoSkills

SECTOR skill council GoSkills says the training option proposed will probably be most acceptable to employees... and almost mirrors much of the NVQ training it sets and monitors.

"The six-hour test option could be off-putting for drivers," said Mrs Ball, though delegates were told that the 'big guns' in the haulage industry are heading down this route, and could over-rule thinking in the PCV market.

Mrs Ball warned there is a shortfall in training capacity already, and that by 2008, it is vital there is investment in facilities and trainers: "We are not blessed with a lot of training as it is," she said. "This is not an easy challenge, especially if the objective is to be delivered through approved trainers."

She said GoSkills is hoping that operators will set up training schools with open access. But she said if the CPC could be aligned with NVQ, there would be the possibility of some Government funding support: "But the Government may take the view that they will not fund mandatory training," she warned.

Closing, Mrs Ball said one of the key issues is 'selling' the cost of the training, both to consumers and drivers: "Is one way to sell it about demonstrating the professionalism in this industry? After all, we are always looking at ways to improve our image."

IVING...

THE NEW CPC IN A NUTSHELL...

WHO IS AFFECTED?

Vocational drivers, new and existing, in categories:

- D1, D1+E, D, and D+E from September 10, 2008
- C1, C1+E, C, C+E from September 10, 2009

ACQUIRED RIGHTS

Drivers as above before the dates given are exempt from initial qualification BUT are subject to five-yearly training (see right).

EXEMPT

- Drivers of vehicles with a max. speed of 45kph or less
- Armed forces, fire and defence
- Drivers of road-testing vehicles
- Emergency services
- Drivers of vehicles used for lessons
- Incidental drivers

INITIAL QUALIFICATION OPTIONS

- Four weeks (140 hrs) or eight weeks' (280 hrs) course attendance, dependent on age, category and length of route driven. Followed by theory test covering 17 objectives of the directive.
- OR four-hour theory test PLUS two-hour practical test includes 90 minutes driving and 30 minutes questions

PERIODIC TRAINING

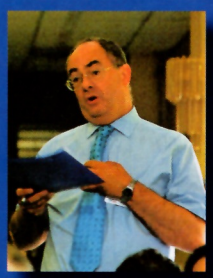
ALL PCV drivers must complete 35 hours of training every five years, in periods of not less than seven hours each, by 2013 – training syllabus as per initial qualification.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Colin Thompson

Colin Thompson, Reading Buses: "Could training before 2008 be taken into account?"
Mandy Lynch: "No. Such training would be outside of the period of scope of the directive, which will come into law in September 2008. You are probably ticking some of the training boxes already, but it would need to be documented in the way the legislation will set out."

Steve Morrison, Tangerine Training: "Could the training be set up so that drivers can get their CPC earlier, say in three years?"
Mandy Lynch: "Yes, the time span over which drivers take the hours of training is up to you."



Alec Horner

Alec Horner, Minimise Your Risk: "Will there be a theory test with questions pre-prescribed, as in the current test? What scope is there for introducing training videos and materials?"
Mandy Lynch: "There is a lot of overlap between the proposed test and the current theory test; they use different words but are basically the same. And yes, we will have to produce materials to support the CPC, and that will include video."

Mr Newton, Craven Arms Coaches: "A lot of my drivers are old, and will not want to retrain. What happens when the country grinds to a standstill?"

Mandy Lynch: "Maybe the training will attract other people to the industry. You should remember that the re-training does not involve an exam at the end. I should also mention that London operators have already been down this training route and put 7,000 drivers through BTec. They didn't leave the industry."

Alan Madrell, Alan Madrell School of Motoring: "There is already a major shortfall of drivers. Who is going to approach the DfT and tell them not to destroy our industry? A bit of paper won't make me a better driver."
Mandy Lynch: "Maybe there are other reasons why people don't want to stay in this industry. As regards standards, the fail rate for the PCV test is currently about 50%. We need better vocational driving standards."

Steven Salmon

Steven Salmon, CPT: "If quoting private hire for schools, it is often the case that the school will look at the cost of putting one of its teachers behind the wheel of a minibus. What will be done to ensure their drivers are trained?"
Mandy Lynch: "This issue is being looked at by legal experts. We want to know if they fall into any of the exempt groups."

Kevin Dolan, Wilts & Dorset: "My experience is that the DSA can't cope with the test we have at the moment. I have waited 12 months to get a delegated driving examiner. How will the DSA ensure there are enough testers?"
Mandy Lynch: "We are very aware of the problems we have. We may have to have more delegated examiners. Last year, we recruited 300 DSA examiners."

WHO WAS THERE?

Andrew Hunter	Travel Dundee
Andrew Norman	Regional Secretary East Midlands
Neil Smith	Travel West Midlands
Austin York	Travel West Midlands
Neil Barker	Travel West Midlands
Madi Pilgrim	Travel West Midlands
Jenifer Digby	Arriva UK
Ian Morgan	Trent Barton
George Peach	Regional Secretary CPT Yorkshire
Dean Robbie	Ipswich Buses
Chris Dudley	Dudleys Coaches
David Holding	Regional Secretary CPT Northern
Paul Tappin	Tappins Coaches
Steve Barnett	Eastbourne Buses
Bernard Rudge	Buzzlines Coaches
Peter Bovington	Buzzlines Coaches
Adrian Stoddart	Buzzlines Coaches
David Couldron	PSV Glass
Endaf Jones	Jones of Login
Sandra Barnett-Marrow	Arriva Midlands
Michael King	Shamrock Travel
Raymond Bertulis	Shamrock Travel
Keith Marshman	R.H. & D.T. Edwards T/A Venture Travel
Justin Thomson	R.H. & D.T. Edwards T/A Venture Travel
Trevor Baugh	Hardings Coaches
Alan Scoles	Shearings
Nicki Heaslip	Shearings
Barrie Marsden	EYMS
Neil Stone	Bakers Coaches of Biddulph
Simon Zaman	Nottingham City Transport
Karl Ward	Nottingham City Transport
John Miller	Belmont
Dorothy Hermiston	Stagecoach
Kevin Brown	Woods Coaches
Peter Skinner	Woods Coaches
Philip Parkinson	Blackburn Transport
Jim Hilton	Blackburn Transport
Kevin Wildy	Thamesdown
Len Green	North Western Regional Secretary
Alec Horner	Minimise Your Risk
Colin Rowe	L.F. Bowen
Steve Morison	Tangerine Training
John McAneny	Tangerine Training
Simon Payne	Tangerine Training
Ian Smithson	Rossendale Transport
Alan Thomson	Rossendale Transport
Robert Montgomery	Stagecoach Group
Colin Thompson	Reading Buses
Kevin Dolan	Wilts & Dorset
Robert Shreeve	B R Shreeve & Sons Ltd
Ken Shreeve	B R Shreeve & Sons Ltd
Chris Davies	Blackpool Transport
Annie Ogilvie	Blackpool Transport
Wayne Lively	Stagecoach East Midlands
David Earl	Stagecoach East Midlands
Tony Wallace	Johnsons
Norman Barsby	Cavalier Coaches
David Meijer	Firstgroup
Alan Hawcroft	Firstgroup
Ian Mills	Brighton & Hove
Steve Thomas	Brighton & Hove
Bob Scowen	Arriva

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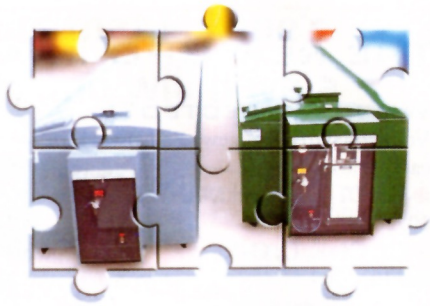

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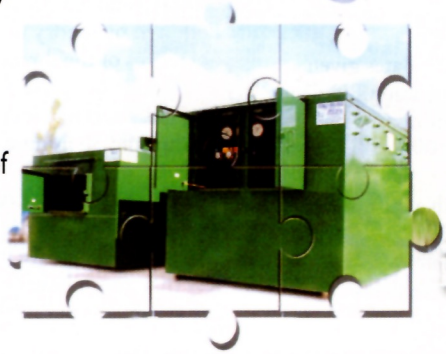

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ADBLUE TECHNOLOGY IS GATHERING PACE

Roll-out at 1,500 Shell stations and retrofit SCR coming soon

BOTTLED AdBlue is to be available at 1,500 Shell service stations by the year end, before bulk filling facilities begin to be installed.

As operators anticipate delivery of the first Euro 4 vehicles – and with most engine manufacturers set to use Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR) – Shell has placed five-litre bottles of AdBlue at 500 of its service stations, and will roll out supplies of the urea-based additive as the year progresses.

"AdBlue supply is an important element of our product offering to our transport customers, alongside quality fuels, a strategically-located network, competitive pricing and added-value road services," said Jacqui Chin, Shell's commercial transport global marketing manager.

Forecourt dispensers are being distributed already, Yara's Air1 launch at Coach and Bus last year demonstrating that, with pump makers such as Brenntag, the urea industry is set to fulfil the need for AdBlue as the technology progressively finds its way into new buses and coaches.

With governments set to introduce vehicle taxation for vehicles with reduced emissions, the announcement by Swedish technology company ETG that a retrofit SCR system has been approved may encourage operators to investigate getting Euro 3 engines down to Euro 4 or even Euro 5.

ETG says its system – approved for Euro 5 by the Dutch certification organisation RDW – will work on any post-1996 vehicle. The ETG system uses a ceramic particulate trap to remove particles larger than 15 nanometres, then a second stage catalytic converter which helps the injected urea to react with NOx to form harmless nitrogen and water.

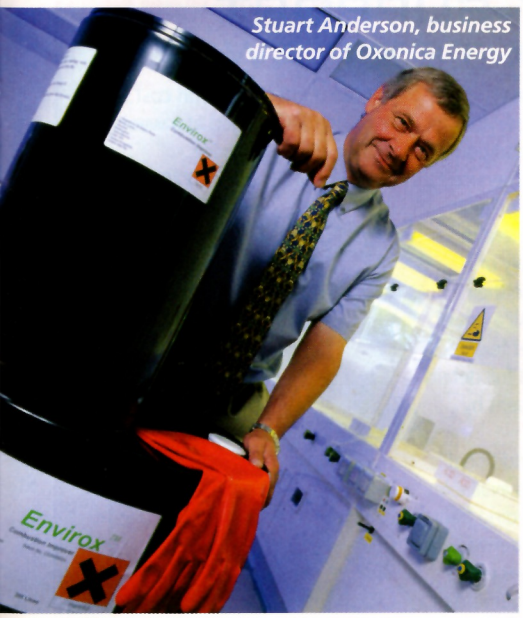
"The vehicle industry has been showing an interest in our technology for some time, and around 100 systems have already been delivered," said sales manager Kenneth Dahlqvist. "The fact that the system has now been certified by RDW means we can market the technology in a completely different way."

- Air1 - 01469 554711 or see *www.yara.co.uk*
- ETG – 00 46 31 652200 or visit *www.emission.se*

STAGECOACH BACKS OXONICA

STAGECOACH has put its financial weight behind the flotation of Oxonica – the technology company which invented fuel additive Envirox.

Having trialled Envirox on 1,000 of its 7,000 UK fleet of buses, Stagecoach last year announced its intention to take Envirox company-wide, and has now introduced Envirox to its New Zealand fleet, with a 5% reduction in fuel consumption and emissions benefits which will reduce carbon monoxide emissions by 1,900 tonnes across the group during the year.



Stuart Anderson, business director of Oxonica Energy

Stagecoach has now gone a step further and, when Oxonica floated on the Alternative Investment Market (AIM) a fortnight ago, was one of the lead investors. The placement of almost nine million shares raised £7.1 million, and together with the conversion of £2 million investor loans to shares, gives Oxonica a market capitalisation of £35 million.

At the core of Envirox are tiny particles of cerium oxide – a catalyst chemical the potential od which has been known for some time. However, Oxonica has succeeded where others failed by entering the realms of nanotechnology.

In Envirox, the cerium oxide is reduced to 10 nanometres, increasing the reactive surface area. The cerium oxide particles are coated then suspended in a carrier fluid. They can then 'convert' monoxides to less harmful dioxides during the combustion process, hitting not just CO but other compounds.

Stagecoach says the hole Envirox will fill in its fuel bill may be as much as the cost of 652,000 litres of fuel a year. It says there are even reductions in particulates, implicated in health problems.

- Details on *www.oxonica.com*, or call 01865 856700

BUILT LIKE A TANK...

WITH some operators replacing the fuel tank five times in the lifetime of the vehicle, ACGB's aluminium replacements could make good sense.

"Buy cheap, pay twice," says the UK sales manager of the French-based company, Marc Stanford. "An aluminium tank for, say, a Dart SLF would be just under £500 - less than twice the price of the standard pressed steel item.

"But a steel tank may last only four or five years. The problem is partly condensation of water inside the tank, which rots it from the inside, and exposure to road salt and surface water. On the SLF, the tank's right behind the rear wheels."

Mr Stanford says operators should assess other costs, too, such as the potential cost of a leaking tank being spotted by vehicle examiners – perhaps an immediate prohibition which could get the attention of the traffic commissioner.

- Call Marc Stanford on 01832 735265, or go to *www.acgb.co.uk*

WHAT'S NEW

LIGHTWEIGHT RELIEF

MARTIN COLE, TECHNICAL AND MINIBUS EDITOR

BUS and coach lower panels could soon be made of plastic thanks to a new process which makes polypropylene mouldings possible.

Aside from the advantages of shock resilience, coach weights often come very close to the legal limit, restricting seating capacity and limiting the amount of on-board refinements that can be provided for the benefit of passengers. The new technology could help reduce this problem.

British engineers and scientists working on the RECYCLE programme – under the SMMT's Foresight Vehicle Initiative - have now perfected a way of producing reinforced polypropylene parts which, they claim, will also help vehicle manufacturers meet stringent new laws on recycling.

Following a two-year research programme, problems of how to mould, join and finish self-reinforced polypropylene (SrPP), which is up to six times stronger than polypropylene (PP) have now been solved.

This development opens the door to a vast range of lightweight vehicle parts that will be stronger, lighter, easier and cheaper to produce than using conventional materials. Lighter vehicles will also help lower exhaust emission levels and increase fuel economy.

Another key benefit will be when the End-of-Vehicle-Life Directive comes into force. All SrPP products can be recycled quickly, easily and cheaply.

Polypropylene, despite many advantages, was not strong enough for many automotive uses without reinforcement using glass fibre, carbon fibre or natural materials like hemp, flax or sisal to make it stronger and stiffer. This resulted in a complex process with added complications and expense in production and recycling.

SrPP is produced from normal PP given heating and weaving treatments which stretch and align the molecules – resulting in a stronger material with no weight gain.

In production, cutting and stamping tools benefit because SrPP contains no glass fibre and therefore reduces tooling costs. Production costs are also kept low as SrPP can be moulded at low temperatures.

The Lotus Elise sports car has already benefitted from SrPP

Finished surfaces are said to be of A1 quality and other cosmetic finishes can be easily added to the final production process to make products that need high-grade finishes.

SrPP products also have high impact strengths, making them excellent for areas of pedestrian safety and passenger protection. Because it is 100% polypropylene, it is non-toxic and highly resistant to corrosion. It also satisfies standard automotive manufacturing tests for hydraulic fluids and fuels.

Trial parts made from SrPP have been produced for the Lotus Elise sports car, which are 57% lighter than the conventional part. Lotus Engineering is one of the partners in the RECYCLE project.

Other partners in the RECYCLE programme include Warwick University, BI Composites and London Taxis International.

METRO LOOKS AT 'BLACK BOXES'

AUSTRALIAN technology company Vigil Systems has delivered a presentation to WYTESA – the West Yorkshire Transport Education Skills Alliance – demonstrating the potential for improving driver skills through using sensors, cameras and GPS location information.

Brisbane-based Vigil Systems already has schemes operating throughout Australia, Asia and North America. The system requires cameras, sensors and GPS equipment to be attached to a bus and they record its movements – including any incidents of heavy braking or sharp cornering.

Information retrieved can be assimilated into a report showing just how the bus is being driven and reviewed on-screen by drivers and instructors.

Metro, the West Yorkshire PTE, is keen to establish a Driver Academy. Its corporate director and chair of WYTESA, Sheena Pickersgill, said: "Metro and WYTESA are keen to deliver significant improvements in bus services for people in West Yorkshire. Plans for the Academy have been developed to achieve these aims."

ABBEY SUPPORT JUST A TEXT AWAY

ABBEY Diesel Direct has upgraded the support services for its fuel cards with the addition of an SMS text messaging service.

The service provides drivers with information on where to locate the nearest supply of fuel where they can use their Abbey card to fill up. All a driver has to do is send a brief text message to Abbey and full details of the nearest site are sent by return.

SMS messaging is additional to the range of services available to Abbey clients – including fleet management, administrative control, direct on-line access to round-the-clock management of the account - allied with cost savings on fuel charged at a weekly nationwide fixed price.

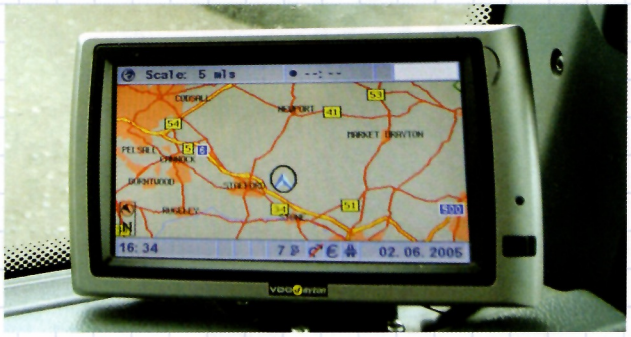
● **Details on 01235 775218, e-mail *info@abbey-group.co.uk*, website *www.discount diesel.***

SAT NAV SAVER

STAFFORD haulage operator Stan Robinson, who now has sat-nav installed in his fleet of 150 trucks, says the move has paid dividends.

Mr Robinson said: "Initially we began installing VDO Dayton MS3200 monochrome systems to assist new drivers on multi-drop operations to navigate their way. However, by the time we had installed them they were proving to be highly efficient with our experienced drivers as well. We decided to upgrade to the full-colour MS 5400 unit and have 55 of these in service.

"Our drivers spend five or ten minutes programming their day's drops – which we find is time well spent. We get a reduction in time wasted driving around looking for a location and an according reduction in fuel consumption.



"Additionally, there is no need to rely on maps and our drivers are free to concentrate on their driving – thus potentially improving operational safety."

The MS 3200 monochrome system has a detachable 3.7" LCD display and a universal mounting system. It can also be hung from the roof as the image can be rotated through 180°.

The MS 5400 full colour GPS system can also accept a rear-view camera and a TV tuner. It has a 5.8" display and comes with an integral speaker, remote control and a scrolling map/split screen facility.

Both units can be equipped to receive Traffic Message Channel – providing live traffic information and the ability to dynamically re-route journeys to avoid hold-ups.

● **Details of suppliers on 0121 326 1151.**

TV IN DISGUISE...

CLAIMED to be a system that's overlooked by petty thieves, VisionMirror is a video screen that looks like a mirror when not in use.

In sizes from 15-inch to 23-inch, the LCD-based TV screen would be ideal for installation in super-execs, for example, where appearance is of primary importance. The screen comes with a TV tuner where required, and there is even a waterproof version which could be excellent for installation in open-top sightseeing buses.

● **Full details from Merlinwood Enterprises, on 01282 843007, or visit *www.visionmirror.com***

GRAMPIAN SELLS OFF HR SYSTEMS

MARKET-LEADING bus software company Grampian has sold off its HR and payroll systems, OpenPeople and OpenAccounts, to CedarOpenAccounts so it can concentrate on its duty allocation software.

Grampian immediately reassured its customers that it will continue to support both software packages within the bus industry, but said it is now focussing on developing and marketing its bus software, already installed with First, Stagecoach, Arriva, Go-Ahead, Lothian, Eastbourne Buses and Yorkshire Traction.

"We believe there is considerable potential to take this existing expertise and expand into new markets in the UK and overseas, and into other transport sectors," said MD of Grampian, Brian Johnston. "We can now focus all our efforts on doing that, confident that our OpenPeople HR and Payroll teams, and our customers, are in safe hands."

● **For details, contact Grampian via the website: *www.grampian-software.co.uk*, or CedarOpen Accounts at *www.cedaropenaccounts.com***

IT'S ICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT

SNOW and ice on yards and approach roads can put you out of action, and with the summer vanishing before our eyes, preparation is well worthwhile.

You could, of course, wait for the council to turn up, but with the major highways as their priority, you could be letting your customers down in the meantime.

The latest SnowEx gritter, the V-Maxx 850, from Broadwood, can be mounted as shown in a pick-up temporarily. It is powered by a 12-volt motor and has no pulleys or belts to go wrong, explaining the two-year warranty.

● **Contact Broadwood International on 01794 388881.**

IN BRIEF

Shere's chip & PIN deal

SPECIALIST ticket machine supplier Shere has launched a range of Chip & PIN dispensing terminals. The first machines have been commissioned and the operator has an agreement with the Strategic Rail Authority to place Chip & PIN ticket dispensers at all its stations before the end of the year.

● Details on 01483 557400 or *www.shere.com*

JPC targets transport

WEBASTO main agent JPC Ltd has shifted its focus from marine applications to the automotive and transport sectors. The Lowestoft-based specialist has opened a new 12,000sq ft workshop and will offer installation and service to support a UK-wide customer base.

● Details on 0870 770 2676 or email sales@jpcdirect.co.uk

Catalogue's a belter

FEDERAL-MOGUL subsidiary AE has launched a new catalogue carrying details of over 4,600 drive belt applications. Catalogues are readily available through AE distributors. Federal-Mogul's CV Brake Shoe Reline Approval Scheme will shortly issue its millionth reline tag. All its Ferodo and Duron relining centres are quality checked to ensure accreditation compliance.

Domeney joins Infocell

REAL-TIME information specialist Infocell has appointed Steve Domeney as field engineering manager. Mr Domeney has two years experience installing information systems in buses and depots and was formerly an RAF missile engineer for 12 years. He will manage a team of engineers installing Infocell's Centurion RTI system currently used by GMPTE, Southampton, Blazefield Holdings and Reading Borough Council.

● Centurion details on 01342 719196.

LEASK RECRUITS A NEW CADET

A GOOD experience with its last new bus, also a Wrightbus Cadet-bodied VDL SB120, meant that which bus to go for next was a no-brainer for Shetland operator John Leask and Son.

Leask runs a tourism empire from Lerwick, the capital of the Shetland islands, catering for all forms of business and holiday travel. Established in 1919 as a taxi company, it now offers package tours, flights and car hire. On the coach and bus side its 21 strong fleet performs a range of duties from private hire to scheduled bus services. The Cadet will join seven other service buses, all low floor, on long rural routes around Shetland's largest island.

One of the main attractions for Leask was the fuel economy it gets from the Cadet's Cummins engine. While its longer and heavier service buses get between 8.5mpg and 9mpg, the Cadets average between 11 and 12mpg.

The cadet has 39 seats with headrests, space for 21 standees, a fold-out ramp with wheelchair space inside the saloon, kneeling suspension, Hanover destination display and air suspended driver's seat.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ engine:	VDL SB120/ Cummins
Body:	Wrightbus Cadet
Transmission:	Allison 2000
Seats:	39
Spec:	Headrests, air suspended driver's seat

Apart from a small problem with the engine which was quickly fixed to its satisfaction, Leask says the bus has performed well.

With driver recruitment being a problem all around the UK, you might think the problem was particularly acute on the Shetland Islands with its population of 22,000. Not so, says Andrew Leask, who now runs the business with his brother Peter, in fact the opposite. Low staff turnover is the key – the newest member of the driving team has been with the company for 15 years.

RICHMOND'S OPTS FOR VAN HOOL

AFTER a tricky evaluation process, Richmond's Coaches of Royston has taken delivery of a pair of new VDL BUS SB4000XF Van Hool Alicron T9s. But all's well that ends well – the company is really pleased with its new vehicles and reports no problems at all.

The coach joins a 25-strong fleet operating a mixture of private hire and in-bound tourist trips, particularly with cruise ship passengers.

"The evaluation was difficult, we tried a few manufacturers," says Andrew Richmond. "We already run a DAF Bova and we have been very pleased with it, but we decided to try a DAF VanHool as well and were equally impressed."

Richmond's VanHool squeezes a webasto pre-heater, climate controlled air con, Hanover electronic destination gear, reversing camera with colour monitor and 53 reclining seats with 3-point belts into its 12m length. Richmond's biggest challenge at the moment is the state of the tourism market. "The season got off to a slow start due to the weather, and the world economy means people have less pounds in their pockets to spend, but things picked up well as the weather improved. Then the London terrorist attacks happened," he said.

He has not seen mass amounts of cancellations, but customers are altering their plans – going to the theatre in Stratford rather than London. By next year he expects things to be back to normal.

FACT FILE

Chassis/ engine:	VDL BUS SB400 0XF/ DAF340bhp
Body:	VanHool Alicron T9
Transmission:	ZF 5HP602
Seats:	53
Spec:	Webasto climate controlled air con, reversing camera with colour monitor

OTHER DELIVERIES

Geminis for Coventry

TRAVEL Coventry has taken delivery of ten new Volvo Wright-bodied Gemini deckers bringing its total investment in new buses in the city to £12m over the last few years. The buses are all low floored, equipped with 'CrystalEyes' CCTV, painted in the distinctive light 'Coventry Blue' and will run on Route 13, which features a new bus lane and stop.

Interserve's Osprey

DRIVER David Wilkins of Interserve FM of Portsmouth is seen here with a newly delivered Rohill Osprey. The vehicle is one of three Rohills used to transport adults with learning difficulties in and around the Cosham district, on behalf of Portsmouth Day Services. The vehicle is based on a 2.8 litre Citroen Relay and has a maximum seating capacity of 16, or eight with three wheelchair passengers. The vehicle is equipped with a Ricon K2005 tail lift.

Goodsir goes Solo

GOODSIR Coaches of Holyhead has just bought its first Optare Solo. The 27-seater was funded with a 50% section 106 grant from Anglesey County Council and will run on local bus routes. Owner Graham Goodsir is reporting increased passenger numbers since the bus was introduced, which he puts down to its low floor easy access. He says they also like the high back seats and the full air suspension. Goodsir opted for the 122bhp Mercedes-Benz engine and Allison 2000 transmission.

A bit of Bova

ELLISONS Coaches are the proud owners of another new Bova FHD 12.340XE Integral. The 12m coach comes with centre sunken toilet, 51/53 luxury seats with wood effect trim, air con with winter protection, webasto pre-heater, ASR traction control, water boiler and fridge, PA/ CD/ DVD system with two monitors and a reversing camera.

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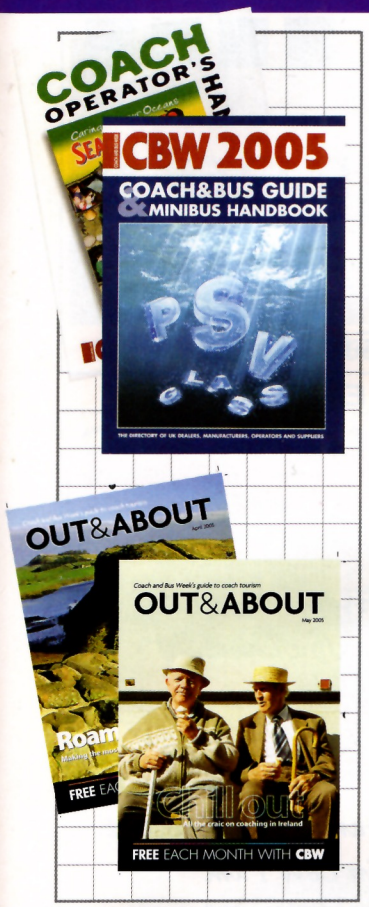

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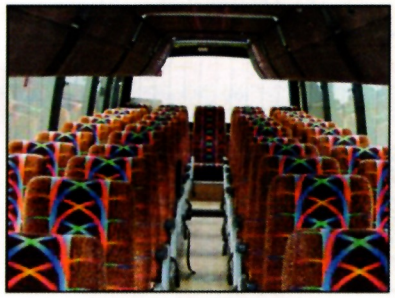

433 SKO Volvo B10M Mk 3 Paramount 3500, 12 metre, ZF manual, first registered 01/03/91, 53 seats recently retrimmed in burgundy with matching headlining, MoT 20/11/2005. Has just been panelled and painted, by Express Coach Repairs at Pickering in 2005. Ex Wallace Arnold tour coach it is very clean and drives well. Plate to be retained. **£21500 + VAT**

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DIARY

PIPE SMOKE WITH A HINT OF ONION...

A COLLEAGUE here at Emap's Transport Division dropped by this week slightly thrilled at having travelled on this Bristol RE.

Before we paint a gricerish picture of the man, we should add that the reason he'd hopped aboard was to get to the Purple Moose Brewery in Porthmadog, North Wales, so whatever his pastime, he can be forgiven. Besides, the bus's owner is the brewer's brother.

The bus – fleet number CRG163, for aficionados – came with its original seats in red moquette: "It reminded me of school trips in the 1970s," said our colleague. "The musty smell must have been as old as the vehicle itself."

This prompted us to wonder exactly what that smell is? It's not just mustiness – old cars have a different smell altogether. There's a hint of fungus, true, but slight overtones of pickled onion and pipe tobacco.

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WHAT IS ITS GREATEST ASSET? People with the commitment and desire to provide the best possible service to its customers.
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AND THE BIGGEST MISTAKE? Getting a PCV licence. My phone doesn't stop ringing in the summer.
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